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BULGARIA
Racial attacks against the Roma in Pleven

Amnesty International's Concern: Amnesty International is concerned about reports of racially motivated attacks on the Roma in Pleven on 26 and 28 March and 1 April 1984. Amnesty International is particularly concerned by reports that the police failed to protect adequately the victims and that in several instances police officers beat members of the Roma community.

Background: At around 9pm on 26 March 1984, a day after a fight between some Roma and ethnic-Bulgarian schoolboys, a group of around 50 "skinheads" attacked Roma homes in Zheleznicar Street in the Storgozia quarter of Pleven. The attackers were armed with Molotov cocktails, firecrackers, knives and sticks and some wore socks over their heads. They shouted racist abuse such as: "We will burn you alive" and "Gypsies shall no longer live in Storgozia". They set fire to the home of Zaharinka Koleva in which the entire roof and much of the furniture were destroyed. When the police arrived, according to some witnesses, they did not intervene to stop the attack and, in some cases, police officers beat the Roma with truncheons to prevent them from leaving their homes. Some police officers were also allegedly shouting racist insults.

Another attack reportedly took place on 28 March at around 8.30pm when the same group of "skinheads" armed with Molotov cocktails, firecrackers and torches attacked the homes of Milka Koleva Marinova, Biser Rusanov Nikolov and Velichka Kirilova Koleva. Windows were broken and household appliances and furniture were set on fire. A spent cartridge was found after the attackers left one of the homes. An hour later the police came together with the fire brigade and an ambulance car. The attack was stopped but none of the perpetrators were arrested, although the identity of many was well known to the local people. When six police officers entered the home of Milka Koleva Marinova to inspect the damage, one officer hit her and her small child with a truncheon. Several other people were also reportedly beaten by the police. In one incident, while waiting at a bus stop, Assen Ivanov was hit by a police officer with an electric club. Many of the people left their homes out of fear and did not return until 1 April.

On the same evening the racial violence spread to the Roma homes in Lozinka Street. Windows were broken and furniture damaged in the homes of Zahari Makedonski, Margarita Panteleeva, Tina Chakiarova, Kosta Arhangelov and Zarko Jordanov. The police arrived half an hour after the attack began but did not arrest any of the perpetrators.

On 1 April a group of "skinheads" similarly attacked the Roma in Laika Street in the same neighbourhood. During this period many Roma were not allowed into the local shops and were attacked on the streets by youths with clubs and metal bars.

Amnesty International is concerned about the rising number of racially motivated attacks in Bulgaria and believes that the lack of adequate protection from racial violence for the Roma community in Pleven represents a violation of the international human rights standards to which Bulgaria is a party. Article 2, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that each State Party undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the alleged beatings of Roma in Pleven by police officers would represent a violation of Article 7 of the ICCPR, which states that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Amnesty International has urged the Bulgarian authorities to initiate an independent and impartial inquiry into the incidence of racial violence and the alleged beatings of the Roma in Pleven, to make public its findings and to bring to justice anyone responsible for human rights violations.